Présentation Ritsumeikan

Hello everyone,

I’m Boris Krywicki, I’m a Phd member of the Liège Game Lab, founded in Liège, Belgium. I study specialized press about videogames, like Famitsu, Dengeki Playstation…) . More particularly, I’m interested about journalists writing for these medias (paper magazines or online websites) and the techniques, the various skills that they use in their daily work. My hypothesis is that nowadays specialized journalists writing about videogames are sensibilized to traditional investigative journalism automatisms and keep them in mind as they do their job, using them not daily but only when a case presents itself. I’m still at the start of my research but I think this enrichment of video game journalists’ occupational ideology might be the result of a transmission from generalist journalists and a professionalization, leading specialized reporters to become more and more polyvalent and multi-skilled.

To explore that field and develop how distinct investigative journalism may be in the video game journalism field in comparison with traditional investigative reporting (meaning Nelly Bly, the Watergate, Gunther Wallraff…), I use mostly sociological and ethnographic techniques : unstructured interviews (Fontana et Frey, 2005 : 705) with contemporary video game reporters. These interviews are then analyzed in the frame of grounded theory to qualify the subjects’ daily experience : do they feel like investigative reporters ? Within which economic and professional context are these articles written ? How do specialized journalists investigate (How much time is allotted? For how long? ) and how this deeper work is integrated in their daily professional routine ?

Asking these questions might have seemed strange a few years ago because video game press has always been one of the subfield most closely in touch with the industry. In french specialized press we could see lately several publications editing investigative stories concerning the video game industry. They’re written, for the most part, by specialized journalists. The best example seems to be Quantic Dream’s affair, which started in january 2018 in 3 different newspapers : Mediapart, Canard PC and Le Monde Pixels. Mediapart and Le Monde are generalist medias (Pixels being the subdivision in charge of informatics in Le Monde while Canard PC only treats video games.

This work harassment affair required investigative techniques of the journalists who worked on it such as sources’ identity protection, multiple and long interviews or working secretly. Netsabes and Maria Kalash from Canard PC worked hand in hand with investigative journalists from Mediapart whereas William Audureau learned investigative techniques from generalist journalists from Le Monde. Other french specialized journalists wrote several investigative reportings aiming to reveal some hidden informations about the industry and telling how games are made internally. French readers being fascinated about Japan, some french journalists have been investigating on how games were designed from creators such as Shigeru Miyamoto, Yoko Taro, Yuji Horii and so on. During my interviews, these reporters told me that the videogame industry is particularly hard to infiltrate – especially Nintendo – and how important it is to have good contacts working in the industry. This goal of bringing some previously unknown information – to reveal something to the readers – feeds these specialized reporters work. Exclusive information are a way to materialize the time and effort spent in research by journalists, eventually justyfing and legitimating the price readers always need to pay to access investigative stories.

We might observe there a paradox : however exclusive and new this hidden information might be, specialized medias consider it as cold news – meaning not prioritary. In Canard PC, investigations are lead only when video games’ daily news are slow and when hot recent titles don’t take much space in the magazine. On the website Gamekult, it’s extremely rare for the core writing team to investigate : this role is more often taken by freelancers (meaning external journalists). Specialized medias’ headlines are rarely teasing investigative stories but rather reviews of well known awaited video games[[1]](#footnote-1).

We can explain today’s investigation’s understatement in video game press regarding its economical history and the tight links it has been maintaining through its development with the industry. This close relationship might be observed within two different spaces : in the journalists’ texts on the one hand ; in their direct interactions with workers from video game companies on the other hand.

During the nineties, video game magazines were full of what I call « celebrative reviews », meaning their authors try to federate using « a strong consensus on readership’s values transforming the buying/subscription/reading act in a communitarian gesture » (Bergala, 1996). In these times, video games were less legitimized and commonplace than nowadays and reporters let themselves write enthusiastic reviews building a fanatic video game-addict modele reader (Eco, 1979) :

« With this new episode of Crash Bandicoot trilogy, discover what fun and ultime beauty truely mean ! Glory to Crash ! […] You think you’ve seen everything ? […] Well, open your eyes because Crash 3 might leave you amazed ! Naught Dog’s team decided to become Santa claus to fulfill you beyond all your hopes » (Joypad n°81, french game magazine, December 1998, personal traduction)

These reviews also tried to be exhaustive and wanted to tell eveything about the games depicted, even if there wasn’t much to say about a specific caracteristic : graphisms, sound, gameplay, story, game length were always reviewed regardless of whether or not reporters have points to make. In one interview he gave me, french journalist William Audureau calls that systematic game proximity the « product culture » :

« It’s, I think, a legacy from 1990’s press, back when first efficent PR grounded and magazine covers stopped to be centered on players or drawings to become more and more illustrated with upcoming games. It’s also the moment when the automatism « news – previews – tests » setteled […]. This product obsession is completly brainless. Meaning, when you arrive in specialized press you don’t ask yourself what you’ll talk about. It seems obvious : you’ll talk about commercial products that always are there, ready and set » (interview with William Audureau, journalist for *Le Monde*, 19th january 2018).

We see less celebrative reviews in today’s specialized press though we can still find some of them – depending on the media’s editorial line and support3. But professional automatisms from the « product culture » remaining the most are undoubtly to seek in reporters’ direct contacts with actors from the industry. The most prevalent remains of this product culture's professional automatisms are most obvious when looking at the reporters' interaction with actors from the industry. An example of these automatisms would be the dependency Video games publishers and specialized press have been creating a mutual dependency on each other : the industry needs reporters to talk about games as much as they need their help to get review copies and access early presentations of games. A few years ago game developers were listening to journalists’ requests or sending PR to negociate with them.

As internet and mostly Youtube grows, specialized media become less followed by large audience which is globaly more interested in entertainment and direct advice online videasts provide. Several reporters tired of being deemed unprofessional want to differenciate themselves from Youtubers and claim their journalistic role and function – for example by signing with their full name or reminding they work as professional journalists and have a press card. This is a huge contrast with 1990’s game magazines : in these publications worked many young fans. For some editorial teams, being a journalist was not a quality but a flaw, a sign you might know nothing about video games (Demoly, 2017).

In this mediatic context investigative stories are a way for video game journalists to claim their independance and offer readers an added value. That being said, there is no such investigative work as the full-time deeply involving traditional style in this specialized press. Specialized journalists use investigative techniques intermittently – now and then – when they get the time, money and occasion to do so. Professionalization in video game press seem recent and has yet to be described during my research. The term « investigative » must also be nuanced. There are many degrees of implications for journalists wanting to do more than passively receiving information from the industry and my work aims to analyze the various behaviours reporters can adopt :

« I’m wondering if we could call that practice ‘initative journalism‘ [rather than investigative‘]. A sort of cold journalism versus a news feed. By ‘initiative journalism‘, I mean trying to create a subject, to build it rather than treating every piece of information that come to us » (Interview with Ivan Gaudé, Publishing director of *Canard PC*, 21st september 2017).

It might be interesting for me to compare french game medias’ dynamics with the ones leading japanese exchanges between game publishers and reporters. Can these investigative stories' features be observed in japanese game journalism field ? How dependent on the industry is video game press yet ? Do japanese specialized publications have distinct editorial lines and try to differentiate themselves from one another ? If you have response and pieces of the puzzle to answer these questions, I’d be delighted to hear them.

Many thanks for your attention.

1. Couvertures des CPC sur Crunch investigation en retrait [↑](#footnote-ref-1)